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Reporters, spies have close ties

Their 'affinity' breeds suspicion

By FRANK GREVE
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WASHINGTON — While no evidence has been offered that U.S. News & World Report correspondent Nicholas Daniloff spied for the CIA in Moscow, it is not surprising that Soviet officials suspect American reporters of espionage.

Indeed, reporters and CIA agents historically have been so chummy that Joseph Fromm, then chief foreign editor for U.S. News, told a congressional committee in 1977 that "a foreign government could be forgiven for assuming that there is some kind of informal link."

Fromm's testimony came amid a series of embarrassing disclosures about the CIA's use of reporters as informants, conduits of disinformation, spies — and even spy masters. The disclosures produced reforms and a climate of mutual suspicion that shattered what Washington Post reporter Ward Just calls "the natural affinity between journalists and spies."

And yet, while reporters and CIA operatives are separated today by CIA regulations, they are not divorced. Though agency rules bar the actual hiring of accredited American journalists for covert missions, informal information-trading — what former CIA Director William Colby terms "mutual back-scratching" — still is encouraged.

"We'd be stupid to cut that off," Kathy Pherson, the CIA's media director, said last week. "Journalists have the same rights as any other American citizen."

In addition, CIA Director William Casey can declare exceptions to the reporter-hiring ban in "an emergency involving human lives or critical national interests." Former Director Stansfield Turner authorized three such exceptions — one involving Iran — between 1977 and 1980.

Editors 'naive'

Turner told a convention of newspaper editors in 1980 that they were "naive" to think any formal regulation could end alliances between reporters and the CIA. "I think a lot of correspondents are patriotic enough" to serve the CIA — perhaps without even informing their superiors, said Turner, adding he "would not hesitate" to approach them.

Many analysts believe Turner's remarks were intended to improve the cover available to CIA agents by forcing foreign counterintelligence agencies to include reporters as suspects.

Soviet officials hardly needed the encouragement. In the past 30 years, they have expelled 28 U.S. correspondents who, in that closed and suspicious society, must adopt the nosy and secretive habits of spies to do their jobs.

Last week, Daniloff said he may have triggered Soviet suspicions when he "worked energetically and probed deeply" to report on such subjects as Soviet military units in Afghanistan, nuclear waste dumps and the shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007.

Such topics involved "secret information," according to Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov.

Daniloff denied "any connection with any government agency" and Soviet allegations that he "acted on instructions" from two former U.S. Embassy diplomats identified by Soviet officials as CIA spies. But he did not address the question of whether the two men had been sources or acquaintances.

"It's a fair supposition that, in a community like Moscow, he might have made their acquaintance," ventured U.S. News senior editor James C. Kilpatrick. "Other former Moscow correspondents have told me they knew nearly everyone in the U.S. Embassy."

No special relationship

He added that the magazine's policy is "that our correspondents should have no special relationship of any kind with any intelligence agency. It's a no-no." Kilpatrick acknowledged that the policy does not rule out CIA personnel as sources: "The operant word is *special*."

Intelligence sources say, however, that Moscow long has been considered too risky for "deep cover" CIA operations, including those that might involve a reporter. Significantly, although exposés during the late 1970s named dozens of reporters and news organizations that had cooperated with the CIA for pay or patriotism, no Moscow-based American correspondent ever has been linked publicly to the agency.

Much of what is known about reporter-spy relations comes from an extraordinary series of House and Senate Intelligence Committee hearings held in 1977, plus the CIA's published regulations and a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit settled in 1982.

Together these sources establish that, through the mid-'70s, hundreds of American reporters worked hand-in-glove with the CIA, and dozens were employed by the agency.

A few, like the late columnist Joseph Alsop, admitted volunteering their services: "I've done things for them when I thought they were the right thing to do," Alsop said in 1977. "I call it doing my duty as a citizen." Others, like New York Times columnist C.L. Sulzberger, acknowledged helpfulness on a "totally informal" basis.

ABC correspondent Sam Jaffe said he had helped the agency — but denied reports that he had been paid to do so. CBS boss William Paley recalled meeting with top CIA officials to discuss opening a CBS News bureau abroad as a cover for an agency operative — but said he could not recall whether the network had done so.

Scores of reporters acknowledge that they were debriefed by the CIA after visits to Communist countries.

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Didn't name names

In 1982, the CIA described how it had used reporters, without naming names. The disclosure, in an affidavit, was part of the settlement of a Freedom of Information suit by Judith Miller, a former Progressive magazine reporter now working for The New York Times, that sought details of the agency's relationship with journalists.

"Some, perhaps a plurality, were simply sources of foreign intelligence; others provided cover or served as a funding mechanism" for agency activities, the affidavit said.

"Some provided nonattributable material for use by the CIA, collaborated in or worked on CIA-produced materials or were used for the placement of CIA-prepared material in the foreign media," it continued.

"Others assisted in nonmedia activities by spotting, assessing or recruiting potential sources or by handling other agents, and still others assisted by providing access to individuals of intelligence interest or by generating local support for U.S. policies and activities."

It concluded: "Finally, with respect to some of these individuals, the CIA simply provided informational assistance or requested assistance in suppressing a media item such as a news story."

The term "handling other agents" means directing and supporting spies, debriefing them, writing reports based on their findings and paying the agents, according to a guide published by the McLean, Va.-based Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

Besides using reporters, the CIA sometimes dispatched its own employees on intelligence missions abroad "who served as real or pretended journalists," according to testimony by Colby, the former CIA director, before the House Intelligence Committee in December 1977.

In a few cases, he said, American reporters were told by the CIA what to report in their dispatches.

Colby said photographers, drivers and other unaccredited personnel working for American news bureaus abroad — including some free-lance writers — were still considered fair game for agency employment (though more recent regulations require the prior consent of the news organization's top management).

Recruiting foreigners

Colby also successfully opposed restrictions on recruitment of foreign reporters or exploiting foreign news media. "I believe that we should not disarm ourselves in this contest in the hopes that the rest of the world will be gentler," he said.

These days, reporters and CIA officials recoil when asked to discuss journalist-spy ties. In Moscow, for example, U.S. briefers won't even talk about the CIA rule against hiring reporters, saying, "We just don't comment on intelligence matters."

Clearly, however, contacts still are frequent between CIA personnel and American journalists abroad. "I consider, and most foreign correspondents consider, intelligence people good sources of information," Fromm, now a contributing editor to U.S. News, said Friday.

"I was just in Japan and Korea, and a New York Times correspondent was with me. He asked me who the CIA station chief in Seoul was, figuring he was probably the best source of information. There's nothing illegitimate about it," Fromm added, even though, in Soviet eyes, such contact might make the reporter seem to be "an unpaid spy."

The somewhat different point of view of a CIA station chief was argued in an affidavit contained in the Miller lawsuit.

The unnamed chief said an agent would approach a correspondent "because he's the guy who knows where all the skeletons are, what's the real story on so-and-so. They make an appointment. They talk. The agency man has information to make him look good. If those meetings don't prove fruitful to the agency man, they will end. So it behooves the journalist to make them useful."

Fromm himself acknowledged the point in his December 1977 testimony before the House Intelligence Committee. "Obviously, the CIA's interest is to get information from a correspondent beyond that which he would report or have reported, because otherwise they could get it," he said.

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